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AUTHOR Knowlton, Marie
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ABSTRACT

A University of Minnesota model for low incidence preservice special education teacher training is focused on visual impairment education and requires completion of four graduate level components for licensure. This model attempts to be flexible and address the needs of the field in providing qualified personnel that will remain in local school districts and attempts to deliver the certification program in a manner in which participation is possible by those who are most closely in contact with the local districts and their needs. A nine quarter credit core of general courses may be taken at any college and transferred to the program. Summer sequence courses, taught only in remote locations, are offered in compact 2- to 3-week sessions and can be completed in two summers. Two courses are available through correspondence, and the 5- to 10-week practicum is individually arranged for each student. A profile of the 1985 summer program reveals that 4 courses were offered with a total of 18 enrollments, creating a mean of 4.5 enrollments per course. Five students came from rural areas, two from the metropolitan area, and one from another state. Average distance traveled per class per student was 583.3 miles. (NEC)

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# MODEL FOR LOW INCIDENCE EDUCTION PRESERVICE TRAINING

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Presented by
Marie Knowlton
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Minnesota
178 Pillsbury Drive S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455

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Model for Low Incidence Special Education
Preservice Training

Rural schools throughout the country have difficulty in attracting and maintaining certified personnel to serve the needs of low incident handicapped students. In the field of visual impairment these difficulties arise from three basic sources. First, there are a very limited number of programs that provide for licensure of teachers of the visually handicapped. At present there are only 42 such programs. Second, low visibility of the need for teachers in visual impairment has resulted in limited the enrollment in the existing programs. Third, the rural schools that do succeed in attracting qualified teachers in specific areas of special education often have difficulty in keeping them. The repeated statement I hear from supervisors and directors of rural programs is the need for continuity in their programs over time. Systematic inquiry indicates that qualified teachers

- for personnel or professional reasons do not wish to disrupt their current teaching schedules to take the additional preservice instruction required for special licensure;
- the social and personal adjustment required to move to a metropolitan area are to great even for a short term summer enrollment;
- the large university environment is too confusing and anxiety producing; or
- family and personnel commitments do not permit

participation in a centralized metropolitan program.

In this presentation I will address these issues as I present a model which is designed for preservice training in the field of visual impairment. Two pilot programs during the past two years have provided positive support for the model and we now wish to adopt it on a more extensive base. The philosophical intent of the model is to provide qualified teachers in visual impairment to the areas where they are needed and where they will provide program continuity to handicapped students who reside in those school districts. Though this model is specific to the field of visual impairment it can be generalized other special education licensures as well.

## The Model

Several models for preservice rural teacher training have been developed. Most of the models are strongly based on the existing curriculum, as they should be if that curriculum has been determined to contain necessary and sufficient information for the prospective teacher. In some models preservice components relating to rural values and rural school organization or administration may be incorporated. Other models provide for tuition incentives to those who come from rural areas to take the programs, or for those

who agree to spend specified amounts of time teaching in rural areas after completion of study. Though these models are innovative in their approach in providing new teachers to rural areas, our experience has shown that the problem persists because they do not remain in the rural areas. We are finding that the college students who grew up in rural areas and initially go back to their home towns to teach often do not remain there. A third type of model attempts to locate a region which has identified needs for specific types of teachers. The preservice program may then be moved to that region for a quarter or semester, either physically by an itinerant model or by teleconference. None of these models fit the need to prepare teachers in low incidence disabilities . It is often difficult to find concentrations of prospective special education teachers sufficient to support a university program. Often a school will need a teacher licensed in physical disabilities, visual impairment, or hearing impairment to meet the needs of only one student. The nearest similar student may be fifty or more miles away. Special education programs in low incidence handicaps are costly for colleges to run when the enrollment may be limited to five to ten students. If a population of preservice special education teachers of sufficient size cannot be located the courses are usually canceled.

The model for low incidence preservice special education teacher training that I am presenting is

focused on training teachers in visual impairment education. The preservice licensure program has four components. All four components must be completed before the student is able to qualify for licensure. There is some flexibility in the sequence of the components but the sequence presented in this presentation is the preferred one.

Core Special Education Courses: At the University of Minnesota all special education preservice licensure programs are at the graduate level. Within each licensure program there are nine required quarter credits of a general nature. The content of these nine credits are also offered at various other institutions of higher learning in the state. Students may enroll at any college offering these courses, take the courses, and transfer the credit to the University of Minnesota when they enroll for the visual impairment licensure program. The advantage to the student is that they can take almost one quarter of the required curriculum at a location in, or near his/her home community.

Summer Program: Essential to the success of the model is the recruitment of students for two years of summer study. Working through the American Printing House for the Blind annual census we are able to identify school districts who might wish to participate in the coming summer program. This census is more accurate in predicting needs in visual impairment because it is not an unduplicated count and thus includes children who are multiply handicapped. The

superintendents of these schools are contacted and encouraged to identify a teacher or parent with a valid teaching license who would be interested in studying for licensure in visual impairment. We also suggest that other teachers in the district who may be interested in continuing education credits in consider our summer program. These teachers will usually take the introductory course in visual impairment and perhaps a methods course. The advantage to the school district in encouraging personnel to take these courses is that these persons can provide support to the special education teacher and decrease the isolation that specialization often produces. The visually impaired students also benefit when more staff are knowledgeable in the special materials and methods used in intervention. The university program benefits in having a larger enrollment for the course.

In addition to soliciting local school districts for possible students, all persons who have made inquiries during the past year and all current students in the visual impairment program are informed as to the content and location of the summer program. In this manner we identify prospective students who are well based in their home communities. They have families, friends, and professional contacts there and share similar interests and values.

The site for the summer program is chosen from among one

of the smaller state colleges which is located outside the seven county metropolitan region of the state. It must be a college that has a summer program, can provide inexpensive dormitory housing, and classroom facilities for teaching and laboratory courses. By locating the program at a remote location our students do not have to experience the stress and confusion of adjusting to metropolitan lifestyles or difficulties of large university administration. Nor do we lose the metropolitan students in our program. The change of pace and pattern of study provides learning opportunities that are not available on the city campus.

The courses in the summer program are offered in intense, compact two to three week sessions. Lectures and laboratories last five hours per day. A student can take from one to four courses each summer, depending on individual needs and progress toward licensure. The delivery method allows persons with teaching and family commitments to participate in the program. It is frequently possible for an individual to make arrangements for a two week commitment but much more difficult to provide for a ten week quarter. The course materials have been developed with the intent that they would be part of a portable educational program. For each course they consist of video tapes, movies, self instruction modules for computers, reprints of appropriate literature, a small library of significant books, and other pertinent materials. Resource persons

from the SEA's, state services, and LEAs are invited to address the class. Throughout the summer sequence students are expected to compile a file of resources suitable to their home locations for their future use. Each course in the summer sequence is taught only in the remote location. A total of five courses totaling sixteen credits are offer in this manner. A student can complete the summer sequence in two summers of study.

Correspondence Courses: Two of the courses in our training program are extremely suited for correspondence courses. The courses are taught during the regular school year. The students can take the courses either by attending lecture or by receiving the study packet and fulfilling the requirements. The are the two courses taught in this manner are literary and mathematical braille. In both these courses students are required to learn to transcribe print into braille. Our students use text editor computer programs that operate much like a standard braillewriter xxx. The lessons are brailled on Apple IIe computers. Upon completion of a lesson the student saves the file and either mails it to the instructor for grading or attaches to the university's mainframe computer by telephone modem, accesses a multiuser account, and uploads the lesson. The instructor can access the account, download tbelesson, grade and comment on it, and then upload it back to the main frame where it is then again available to the student.

Practicum: A practicum of five to ten weeks is individually arranged for each student. It consists of several placements for observation and teaching. These placements include residential schools for visually handicapped, resource room programs and mainstreamed placements. The student is then paired with a certified itinerant teacher. This teacher must have several visually handicapped students exhibiting diverse degrees of visual impairment and a variety of individual needs. It is expected that the preservice teacher instruct and evaluate progress in specific components of the IEPs under the direction of the itinerant teacher.

Results:

The model presented in the preceding section is currently being examined and tested under field conditions. I will address, here, only the evaluation of the summer program. The correspondence courses have been address in other publications (Knowlton, 1984). The summer of 1985 was the first attempt to implement the summer program of the model. A profile of the summer program is presented in table 1. Four courses were offered with a total eighteen enrollments, creating a mean of 4.5 enrollments per course. This is a very low enrollment and I must explain that the program in visual impairment at the University of Minnesota has been relatively inactive for approximately fifteen years. It is expected that as the the current program

gains visibility the enrollments will increase.

Of greater interest is a profile of the eight students who participated in the course. The summer program was offered at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota, 150 miles from the metropolitan, twin cities area. Five students came from rural areas, two from the metropolitan area, and one from another state. However, those from rural areas were not necessarily from the region in which the college was located. The distances the students traveled to class was revealing. Initially, we thought that the major difficulty in attracting rural teachers to classes in the metropolitan area was the distance they had to travel. The mean distance between home and the Minneapolis campus is 185.6 miles (range 20-700 miles) and the mean distance to the Marshall campus is 210 miles (range 30-700 miles). The average distance traveled per class per student is approximately 583.3 (1100-1420 mi.) miles.

For a more graphic view of the home locations of the students taking the summer program in visual impairment consider figure 1. Minnesota is divided into eight Educational Cooperative Service Units (ECSU). Half of these are represented in the summer enrollment.

Surveys of the students determined the predominant reason for taking the courses was an awareness of the need for teachers of visual impairment and because the

district where the student was already teaching had visually impaired children enrolled. Only one student had partial financial support from the local school district. The current employment for students in the summer program indicates that six of them are employed in school districts serving visually handicapped children. The other two are full time graduate students at Minnesota.

Discussion:

The model I have presented is one that (1) attempts to be flexible and address the needs of the field in providing qualified personnel that will remain in local school districts and (2) to deliver the certification program in a manner in which participation is possible by those who are most closely in contact with the local districts and their needs. The students in the summer program readily expressed their opposition to the prospect of taking courses in a location that required them to change their life styles, force them to negotiate with a large academic administration, and incur the expense of urban living. If we consider that the ultimate goal for low incidence special education is to provide continuity to programs through qualified teachers in a least restrictive environment, we provide little support if we do not address the ways in which the target population can access existing programs.

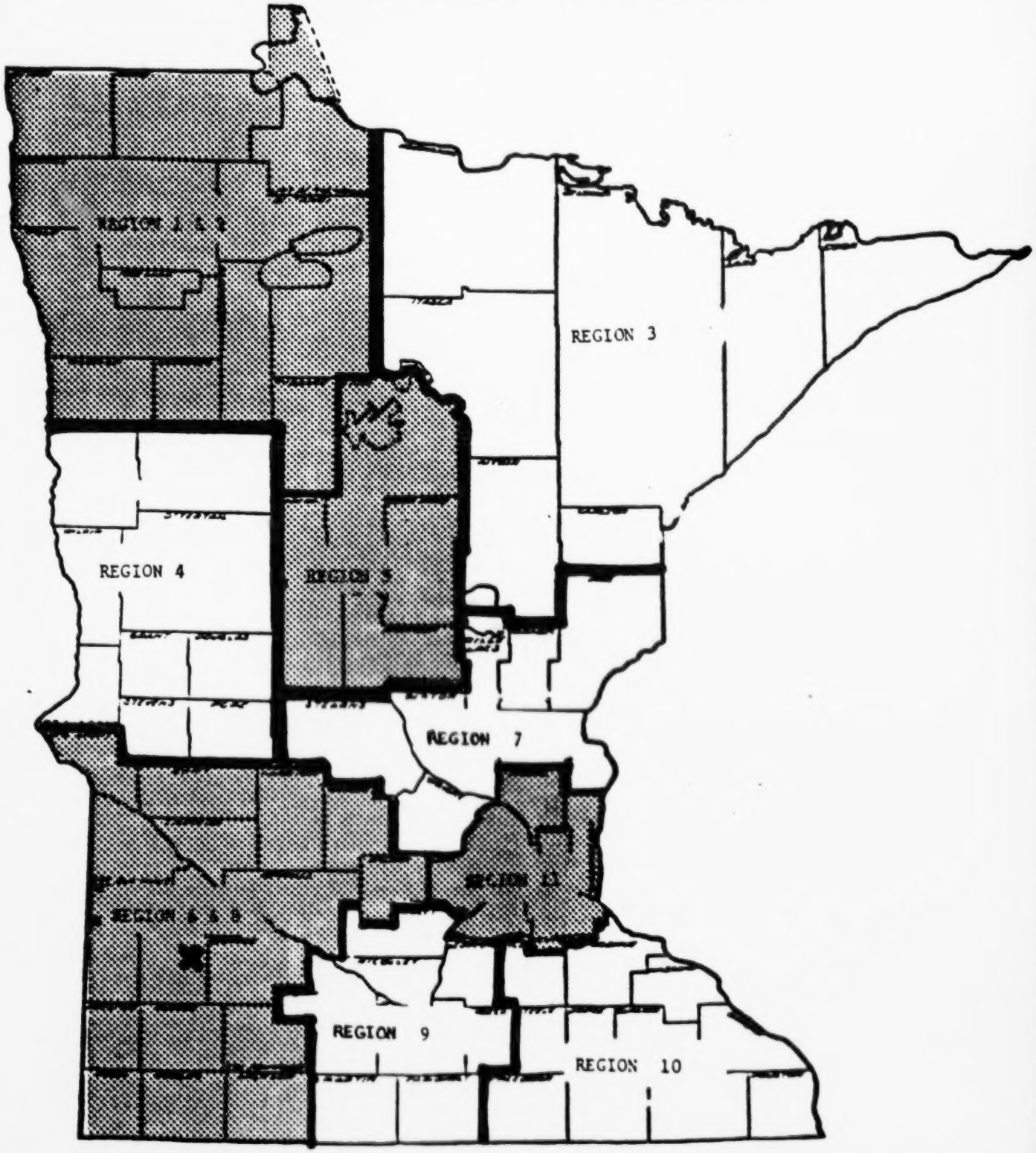
Table 1. Profile of 1985 summer visual impairment program

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of courses offered | 4 |
| Number of students | 8 |
| Number of enrollments/summer | 18 |
| Average number of courses taken/student | 2.25 |
| Average enrollment/course | 4.5 |

Table 2. Profile of students in 1985 summer visual impairment program

| | range | mean |
|---|---|---|
| Distance of home district from Mpls. | 20-700 mi. | 185.6 mi. |
| Distance of home district from Marshall | 30-700 mi. | 204.4 mi. |
| Average distance traveled per class | 1420-1100 mi. | 583.3 mi. |
| Total miles traveled per summer | 420-2800 mi. | 1312.5 mi. |
| Additional living expenses per class | $12-$125 | $70 |

REGIONS OF MINNESOTA REPRESENTED IN SUMMER PROGRAM



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